

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
TRSE-00 /066 W
-----127725 191923Z /43

R 191721Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3656
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL TRIESTE POUCH
AMCONSUL TURIN POUCH
USDOCSOUTH
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 11340

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJ: INITIAL PARTY POSTURING FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

SUMMARY: ON JUNE 29, THE TWO HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ITALIAN REGIONS WILL CONVENE TO BEGIN THE ELECTION OF A SUCCESSOR TO PRESIDENT LEONE. WITH ONLY TEN DAYS LEFT TO WORK OUT BOTH INTERNAL AND INTRA-PARTY POSITIONS, THE PARTIES ARE ENGAGED IN FEVERISH CONSULTATIONS AND POSTURING. SINCE THE SELECTION OF A NEW PRESIDENT WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT AND POSSIBLY DECISIVE EFFECT ON THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK IN THE ENSUING PERIOD, THE PROBLEM IS BOTH INTRICATE AND POLITICALLY IMPORTANT. THE ISSUE HAS ALREADY SET COMMUNIST AND SOCIALISTS ON

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EDGE. ACCENTUATING THE GROWING SPLIT IN THE LEFT AS A RESULT OF THE PSI'S NEW POLICY OF "AUTONOMY." THE COMMUNISTS WANT THE NEW PRESIDENT SELECTED ON THE BASIS OF "THE WIDEST POSSIBLE AGREEMENT BETWEEN ALL THE DEMOCRATIC FORCES" IN ORDER TO PRESERVE AND STRENGTHEN THE PCI'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PRESENT POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT. FEARING THAT THE PCI HAS ALREADY REACHED AGREEMENT WITH THE

DC TO SUPPORT A DC CANDIDATE, THE PSI (AND THE LAY PARTIES) HAVE CALLED FOR THE ELECTION OF A LAY CANDIDATE AS AN IMPLICIT GUARANTEE AGAINST FURTHER DC-PCI ACCOMODATION. SINCE THE PSI HAS NO STRONG CANDIDATE TO OFFER, THE PSI'S POSITION APPEARS DESIGNED TO INCREASE ITS INFLUENCE IN THE SELECTION OF A NEW PRESIDENT. THE DC, WHOSE DIRECTORATE MEETS ON JUNE 20, HAS SO FAR LET THE PCI AND PSI DO ALL THE TALKING, AFFIRMING THAT IT IS "PREMATURE" TO DISCUSS NAMES. THE DC WILL EVENTUALLY HAVE TO TAKE SOME DIFFICULT DECISIONS, HOWEVER, SINCE THE ELECTION OF VIRTUALLY ANY DC CANDIDATE COULD OPEN UP COMPLICATED PARTY OR GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. AT 1600 LOCAL ON JUNE 29, THE MEMBERS OF THE TWO HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT JOINED BY 58 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE REGIONALS WILL GATHER TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF ELECTING A NEW PRESIDENT. OVER THE NEXT TEN DAYS, VIRTUALLY ALL POLITICAL ACTIVITY WILL CONCENTRATE ON INTRICATE INTERNAL AND INTRA-PARTY NEGOTIATIONS LEADING UP TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. ANDREOTTI'S JUNE 21 "ECONOMIC SUMMIT" WITH THE FIVE PARTY SECRETARIES WILL REPORTEDLY BE POSTPONED IN ORDER TO AVOID THE "INOPPORTUNE" IMPRESSION THAT THE PARTIES MIGHT UTILIZE THE MEETING TO REACH PRIOR AGREEMENT ON THE PRESIDENCY. THE JUNE 25/26 REGIONAL ELECTIONS
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IN FRIULI-VENEZIA-GIULIA AND VALLE D'AOSTA ARE ALSO BEING WATCHED FOR THEIR POSSIBLE IMPACT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL CHOICE. IF THE PSI CONTINUES TO PERFORM WELL ON JUNE 25. AT THE PCI'S EXPENSE, THE PSI'S "AUTONOMIST" POSITION (IE, INDEPENDENT OF THE PCI) COULD HARDEN FURTHER.

2. THE SELECTION OF A NEW PRESIDENT HAS ALREADY ACCENTUATED THE GROWING DIVISION BETWEEN THE PCI AND PSI. THE SOCIALISTS (AND OTHER LAY PARTIES) CLAIM THAT THE DC AND PCI MAY ALREADY HAVE REACHED AGREEMENT ON A DC CANDIDATE. IN INCREASINGLY SHARPER TONES, PSI LEADER CRAXI HAS CALLED FOR THE ELECTION OF A PSI OR LAY CANDIDATE IN ORDER TO PRESERVE A "BALANCED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE POLITICAL FORCES." POINTING OUT THAT DC CONTROL OF BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESIDENCY IS POLITICALLY "UNBALANCED," THE PSI HAS AFFIRMED IT WILL NOMINATE ITS OWN CANDIDATE AS AN IMPLICIT GUARANTEE AGAINST FURTHER DC-PCI ACCOMODATION. THE PSDI AND PRI, SOMEWHAT MORE

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CAUTIOUSLY, HAVE ALSO INDICAED SUPPORT FOR A LAY
CANDIDATE (ALTHOUGH NOT NECESSARILY A SOCIALIST).
THE LIBERALS HAVE EXPLICITLY WARNED THAT DC-PCI
ACCORD ON THE PRESIDENCY "COULD BE A DECISIVE STEP
TOWARD THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE."

3. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE REACTED SHARPLY TO CHARGES
OF COLUSION WITH THE DC. SPEAKING IN FRIULI,
BERLINGUER DENIED THE EXISTANCE OF "SECRET AGREE-
MENTS" WITH THE DC AD TRIED ALSO FOUND IT NECESSARY
TO DENY THAT THE PCI HAD ENGINEERED LEONE'S
RESIGNATION IN COMPLICITLY WIT THE DC. THE PCI
HAD MADE ITS WEIGHT FELT, HE ASSERTED IN TRIESTE,
"FOR PRECISE POLITICAL MOTIVATONS." THEPCI
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COULD NOT "REMAIN IMPASSIVE BEFORE A WEAKENING OF

(PRESIDENTIAL) AUTHORITY THAT REFLECTED NEGATIVELY OVER THE ENTIRE POLITICAL SITUATION AND RISKED PROVOKING UNFORSEEN BREAKDOWNS."

4. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE NOT YET FORMALLY EXPRESSED A PREFERENCE FOR A CATHOLIC OR LAY CANDIDATE (INDEED, THEY HAVE EVEN ALLOWED FOR A PCI CANDIDATE, AT LEAST THEORETICALLY). THEY HAVE MADE IT CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE NEW PRESIDENT SHOULD PERFORM THE FUNCTION OF STRENGTHENING THE EXISTING POLITICAL FRAMEWORK (IE, THE PCI'S PARTICIPATORY ROLE IN GOVERNMENT). THUS, BERLINGUER HAS CALLED FOR THE CHOICE TO BE MADE ON THE BASIS OF "THE WIDEST POSSIBLE ACCORD BETWEEN ALL THE POPULAR, DEMOCRATIC AND ANTI-FACIST FORCES." TRANSLATED IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ITALIAN, THIS MEANS A CANDIDATE (PREFERABLY DC) CAPABLE OF PROMOTING A COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PCI. IN TRIESTE, BERLINGUER ALSO SAID THE CANDIDATE MUST BE MORALLY UPSTANDING. MANY OBSERVERS INTERPRETED THE PCI LEADERS'S REMARKS AS REFERRING TO ZACCAGNINI.

5. FOR THE MOMENT, THE DC HAS LEFT THE PCI AND PSI DO ALL THE TALKING. IN A STATESMANLIKE STANCE THAT HAS FOOLED NOBODY, THE DC HAS SAID IT WILL "PLACE THE SUPREME INTEREST OF THE NATION BEFORE THE PARTY'S OWN NEEDS." THE DC DIRECTORATE WILL MEET ON JUNE 20 TO CONSIDER THE PROBLEM, BUT NO DECISION ON PARTY CANDIDATE IS EXPECTED SOON. THE PARTY'S FORMAL NOMINATIONS WILL EVENTUALLY BE MADE BY THE DC'S SENATE AND CHAMBER GROUPS. NO DC CANDIDATE
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(ZACCAGNINI, ANDREOTTI, FANFANI) HAS YET RECEIVED HIS CARDS.

6. COMMENT: THE INITIAL SPARRING OVER THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEXT HAS AGAIN REVEALED THE NERVOUS TENSION THAT CHARACTERIZES THE PRESENT PCI-PSI RELATIONSHIP. ALTHOUGH THE PSI WILL PROPOSE ITS OWN CANDIDATE, ITS CHANCES DO NOT APPEAR PROMISING. THE PSI THEREFORE APPEARS MAINLY INTENT, AS PART OF ITS "AUTONOMIST" LINE, TO KEEP THE POLITICAL POT BUBBLING SUFFICIENTLY TO INCREASE ITS INFLUENCE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PROCESS. FINALLY, ONE OF THE MOST COMPLICATING FACTORS IS THAT, WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, THE NOMINATION OF ANY DC CANDIDATE OPENS UP SERIOUS GOVERNMENT OR PARTY LEADERSHIP VOIDS THAT COULD HAVE A DESTABILIZING EFFECT ON THE PRESENT

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK.GARDNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESIDENT, PARTY ELECTIONS, PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ROME11340
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780255-0741
Format: TEL
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780644/aaaablyg.tel
Line Count: 225
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8af14086-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2298489
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INITIAL PARTY POSTURING FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SUMMARY: ON JUNE 29, THE TWO HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ITALIAN REGIONS WILL CONVEN
TAGS: PINT, IT
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8af14086-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014